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Sustaining the People's Lands:

Recommendations for Stewardship of the National Forests and Grasslands into the Next Century

K. Norman Johnson, James Agee, Robert Beschta, Virginia Dale, Linda Hardesty, James Long, Larry Nielsen, Barry Noon, Roger Sedjo, Margaret Shannon, Ronald Trosper, Charles Wilkinson, and Julia Wondolleck

The Committee's Assignment:

In December 1997, the Secretary of Agriculture, Dan Glickman, convened an interdisciplinary Committee of 13 Scientists to review and evaluate the Forest Service's land and resource management planning process. The Committee was asked to:

- Recommend how to best accomplish sound resource planning within the established framework of environmental laws and within the statutory mission of Forest Service.
- Provide technical advice on the land and resource management planning and provide material for the Forest Service to consider in revising planning regulations.
- Recommend improvements in Forest Service coordination with other federal land management or resource protection agencies, state and local government agencies, and tribal governments.
- Suggest a planning framework under current law and policy that could last a generation.

The Committee's Approach:

The Committee met in cities around the country where it heard from Forest Service employees, representatives of tribes, state and local governments, related federal natural-resource agencies, and members of the public. The Committee used many of the approaches and improvements to planning undertaken across the country.

Following is a Summary of the Committees Recommendations:

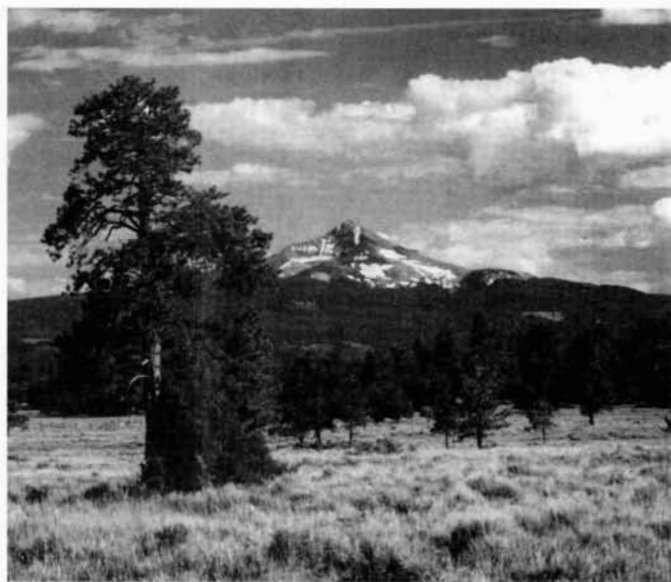
1) Make Sustainability the Overarching Objective of National Forest Stewardship

The national forests and and grasslands constitute an extraordinary national legacy created by people of vision and preserved for future generations by diligent and far-sighted public servants and citizens. They are "the people's lands," emblems of our democratic traditions. These lands provide many and diverse benefits to the American people. Such benefits include: clean air and water, productive soils, biological diversity, goods and services, employment opportu-

nities, community benefits, recreation, and naturalness. They also provide intangible qualities such as beauty, inspiration, and wonder.

The Committee believes that sustainability in all of its facets—ecological, economic, and social—should be the guiding star for stewardship of the national forests and grasslands.

Looking back across the century, a suite of laws, starting with the Organic Act of 1897, call for federal agencies to pursue sustainability. Thus, for the past 100 years, we, as a nation, have been attempting to define what we mean by "sustainability," in part through our grand experiment in public land ownership. In the process, we have broadened our focus from that of sustaining commodity outputs to that of sustaining ecological processes and a wide variety of goods, services, conditions, and values. The concept of sustainability is old; its interpretation and redefinition in this report should be viewed as a continuation of the attempt by Gifford Pinchot and others to articulate the meaning of "conservation" and "conservative use" of the precious lands and waters known as the national forests and grasslands.



Uncompahgre National Forest.

2) Ecological Sustainability: A Necessary Foundation for Stewardship

The Committee recommends that ecological sustainability provide a foundation upon which the management of national forests and grasslands can contribute to economic and social sustainability.

The Committee believes that conserving habitat for native species and the productivity of ecological systems remains the surest path to maintaining ecological sustainability. To accomplish this, the Committee suggests a three-pronged strategy:

- Maintain the viability of selected "focal" species and their habitat needs;
- Maintain conditions necessary for ecological integrity, i.e., the characteristic composition, structure, and processes of the ecosystems; and
- Monitor the effectiveness of this approach in conserving native species and ecological productivity.

The Committee has drafted regulatory language to help the Secretary understand how this strategy might be converted from concept to application.

With the Committee's recommendations, choices in management still exist about the level of risk.

3) Economic and Social Sustainability: Contributing to the Wellbeing of People Today and Tomorrow

Conservation and management of the national forests and grasslands can promote sustainability by providing for a wide variety of uses, values, products, and services and by enhancing society's capability to make sustainable choices. To accomplish this goal, the Forest Service should:

- Assess the contributions of national forests and grasslands to society.
- Recognize the interdependence of forests and grasslands with economies and communities.
- Recognize the rights of American Indian Tribes.
- Search for strategies and actions that provide for human use in ways that contribute to long-term sustainability.

4) Consider the Larger Landscapes in which the National Forests and Grasslands are Located to Understand their Role in Achieving Sustainability

Recognize the special role that national forests and grasslands play in regional landscapes.

Recognize national and global implications of managing national forests and grasslands.

5) Build Stewardship Capacity and Use a Collaborative Approach to Planning

Assess resource conditions and trends as joint public-scientific inquiries that build both a knowledge base for planning and institutions and relationships to carry out stewardship.

Work with other public and private organizations, and engage communities and citizens in envisioning and working toward a sustainable future on the national forests and grasslands.

Establish collaborative relationships that provide opportunities and incentives for people to work together and contribute to forest planning in meaningful and useful ways.

Address all federal lands within the area and work, to the degree feasible, with all affected federal agencies.

Use the NEPA review process as an opportunity to coordinate across agencies and responsibilities.

Make plans understandable to the American people.



U.S. Forest Service
Photo



Nebraska National Forest.

6) Make Decisions at the Spatial Scale of the Issue or Problem (Fit Decisions to the Problems)

Develop overall guidance on sustainability for bioregions. Undertake strategic planning of large landscapes within regions for attaining long-term goals and conduct project-level planning for small landscapes.

Recognize that we need to learn systematically about successful and unsuccessful approaches to planning and set up experiments and pilots across the country to try different approaches.

7) Use the Integrated Land and Resource Plan as an Accumulation of Planning Decisions at All Levels and as an Administrative Vehicle for Plan Implementation

Make these "loose-leaf" plans dynamic and evolving, reflecting the outcomes of adaptive management.

Support local-management flexibility with independent field review.

Keep decisions close to the planning area.

Identify the suitability of land for resource management as an outcome of planning.

Use principles of efficiency and analysis in planning, plans, and management and to help determine the suitability of land for timber production.

8) Make "Desired Future Conditions" and The Outcomes Associated with Them the Central Reference Points for Planning

Establish pathways to the desired future conditions and outcomes in large landscape plans that can guide small landscape decisions.

Create incentives within the Forest Service that reward undertaking activities and achieving the conditions needed through time to move to the desired future.

9) Make Effective Use of Scientific and Technical Analysis and Review

Involve the scientific community in developing strategies for maintaining ecological, economic, and social sustainability.

Establish a national science and technology advisory board.

Involve the scientific community in designing procedures for monitoring and adaptive management.

Establish independent reviews on the use of technical and scientific information in planning.

10) Integrate Budget Realities into Planning

Set long-term goals considering likely budgets and acknowledge that actual budgets affect the rate of progress to the goals.

Consider putting more national forest goods and services, such as recreation, on a paying basis to help provide a stable-funding source.

11) Special Guidance on Watersheds and Timber Supply: Traditional Focuses of the Forest Service in Achieving Sustainability

Given the continuing attention to these two important resources, the Committee has developed general recommendations in response to language in the National Forest Management Act and other laws:

Develop a strategy for conserving and restoring watersheds:

- Provide conditions for the viability of native riparian and aquatic species.
- Maintain and restore watershed integrity; that is, maintaining and restoring the natural composition, structure, and processes of the watershed, including their flow regimes.

- Recognize watersheds in assessment and planning.
- Develop an overall strategy for setting priorities for restoration and use.
- Energize the people of the watershed to help provide stewardship.
- Monitor watershed conditions over time as part of adaptive management.

Recognize the role of timber harvest in achieving sustainability.

Recognize the need for predictable timber supplies and how adherence to sustainability increases long-term predictability.

Focus on desired conditions and the actions needed to produce these conditions, including timber harvest, in planning, budgeting, and monitoring.

Past planning, which often focused on timber harvest and the allowable cuts, tended to polarize people and groups. Planning that focuses on desired future conditions and outcomes, and the activities to achieve them, on the other hand, gives the Forest Service its best chance to unify people on the management of the national forests.

Budgeting by amount and type of actions needed, rather than volume of harvest, will ensure that the needed treatments occur.

12) Recognize External Influences on Collaborative Planning and Stewardship

The Forest Service must deal with many external influences on planning and stewardship.

Consider developing a consistent approach across federal agencies for addressing protests and appeals.

Recognize that differences exist in legal responsibilities and missions across federal agencies and that some friction is inevitable, but that a coordinated planning approach should smooth some difficulties.

Recognize that actions by Congress and the administration can undercut plans and render collaborative planning ineffective.

The complete report is available on the Forest Service website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/science>

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